Full Length Research Paper

Brand perception in the function of strong brand formation

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The paper represents a part of the research regarding the consumers' perception of the brands' attributes. In the research, two test specimens were used. The selection of 35 attributes capable for describing the brands was made using the first, smaller specimen, and the second specimen, which included 1180 examinees, was used to determine the perception intensity of the attributes when the examinees favourite brands are concerned. On this occasion, the research results regarding the brands' attributes marked as the most desirable by the examinees will be presented. These attributes are useful, urban, practical, creative and global. Perception intensity of the mentioned attributes is shown with respect to the examinees sex and age, the luxury of the brand and brand's industry.

Key words: Brand perception, marketing strategy, branding process, brand attributes.

INTRODUCTION

It is undisputable that majority of people have their favourite brands. It is also undisputable that these brands provoke different emotions in them. If the emotions are positive, a brand has bigger chances to become favourite. Emotions are category that is very hard to quantify. A way that we can use in order to get the answer about what is that consumers feel when they think or use their favourite brand, as well as the intensity of the emotion is to offer them attributes that are assigned to a brand. This way we can define the intensely experienced attributes, rank them accordingly and use them in the beginning of a branding process, as well as during the very process so that we can manage the brand in the anticipated direction (Figure 1). Besides, brand creation also implies a decision on the type of message that brand will send to its consumers. A brand strength predominately depends on how consumers experience that brand.

If we have a list of attributes that provoke the most intensive emotions when we talk about favourite brand, it is much easier to create and manage it and associate the very attributes with the brand. A brand identity is a base that, in later phases of creation and brand maintenance, provides a clear, concrete and focussed business running, without unnecessary moving away from the set goal. A good example of well-established brand identity is German car producer 'BMW' that built in its slogan ultimate driving experience deeply into consumers' minds and, in later phases, managed to build it in every segment of its business activities. Today, when we mention 'BMW', everyone thinks of a good quality drive that can be hardly met by its competition. Whatever it does, 'BMW' can stop at any moment and ask itself whether its current efforts are in compliance with its identity, that is whether they contribute to upmost driving experience. This way, the company maintain the focus and does not only meet the customers' needs.

The mapping of stakeholders presents an extremely important segment of a branding process and implies recognizing all the points of contact with the environment. Branding is done at these very points. They should be addressed individually and the efforts should be directed

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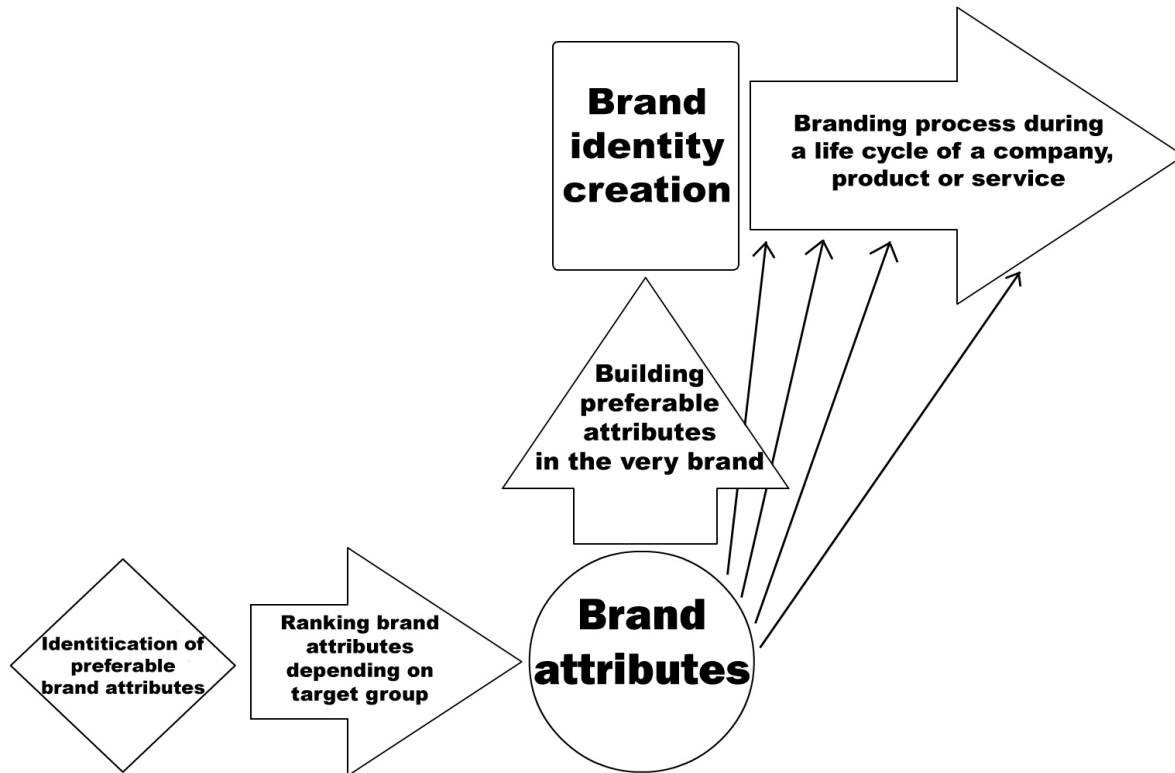
Figure 1. Attribute brand usage in branding process.

towards the improvement of each of them, starting with the points of contact with consumers, contacts between a brand and employees and other points of contact between a brand and other stakeholders. Human characteristics can be appointed to brands (brand personality), so that they can be described by the attributes that are used for description of people. If we assume that our loved ones can be given some attributes that can describe them, then we can apply that to brands as well. This means that we can make a list of attributes that are experienced most intensively in connection with consumers' favourite brands and use it in a branding process building in the most intensely experienced attributes into the brand we wish to create or improve. If the brand's essence is more about the consumers than the product or service itself, it is clear that the brand formation should be based on the brand's function perceived by the consumers rather than on what does the brand represent for the company (Aaker, 1991, 1995). There are many suggested brand models, but one thing that they have in common is that the brand is based on three components: functional component, comparative component and emotional component (Fisk, 2006). When analysing the components, it is necessary to answer the questions:

i) What does the brand do for the consumers? (functional component),
ii) What makes the brand different form the competition's brand? (comparative component),
iii) What feelings does the brand evoke in the consumers? (emotional component).

Having analysed the aforementioned components, one can articulate the brand's essence or identity. In order to be more desirable and long lasting, brands must rely on the idea that they represent rather than on the benefits the market is supplied by their products/services or companies. They must not only satisfy the consumers' needs but also must represent human aspiration (Aaker, 2000), they must not only inform, but also must challenge. When the brand's identity is articulated, it is conveyed to the consumers by every available means and media, starting from the name and logo, along the products and services, advertising and brochures, colours and packaging, uniforms and business spaces (Nedeljković – Pravdić, 2010). Every company or product's aspect in some way produces a kind of experience in the consumers, enabling constant representation of s brand in a direct or indirect way. A former SAS director (Scandinavian Airlines System) once

said: "Each person, each promise and each action are crucial moments".

Review of literature and corporate best practice

While the creation of the business strategy implies the setting and accomplishment of the business goals, the creation of the company's brand emphasizes, by using the language and symbols, the reason for business existence and what is the company's contribution to the consumers. It is clear that there is a connection between the business strategy and branding strategy because the business strategy defines the business rationally, while the branding strategy defines it emotionally (Kotler and Keller, 2006). The most famous café chain Starbucks was the result of frustration that its initiator Howard Shultz experienced due to lousy service quality in the cafés in Seattle. He identified the place which was neither working place nor home, but the place where the consumers can escape the everyday routine. The wide range of drinks, comfortable interior design and service routine help them in this. Along Starbucks, other brands emphasize its essence, by setting in motion and by supporting the consumers in their aspirations and efforts (Kotler and Keller, 2006), such as in the following examples:

i) Nike – "to do your best" (to achieve the best you can),
ii) Coca Cola – "to refresh" (to freshen),
iii) Microsoft – "to help realize your potential" (to help you see you potentials).

Even in the industrial branches such as cement or artificial manure production, desirable and good brands can be deigned. Cemex or BASF differ from the competitive producers in producing the cement that dries more quickly, or in producing the manure that makes you grass more green. The brand is defined in a way it is experienced, by image and reputation created in the consumer's conscience. The company's brand is the company's reputation. The product's brand is the product's reputation (Bedbury and Fenichell, 2003). Does one achieve better sport results by wearing Nike or Adidas, and does Coca Cola refresh better than Pepsi. The great brands are rarely according to the consumers' taste, some people like them, some do not, but anyway they affect the emotions. The director of a famous consultant company Saatchi and Saatchi, Kevin Roberts, points out that "really strong brands are the one you love deeply and unconditionally…" More attention is paid to the branding of a company, which increases the company's product value, while in the previous period the attention was paid to the product branding. This is a result of the fact that there is an increase in the number of the companies offering services, and both conscience and ability to inform the consumers about the companies that are behind the products have increased (Gobe,

2006). Nowadays the majority of the mass-consumption products clearly point out the brand of the parent company. This rarely happened earlier so the consumers have never heard for Procter and Gamble or Unilever even though they used their products every day. Organizationally, this means the effort of the marketing department is not enough any more, but the brand should be created from the sheer management top, and every larger part of the company must significantly contribute to the brand's creation (Adamson, 2006).

The brand alludes to both a company and organisation, but also to all stakeholders connected with it. Since the brand largely influences the business operations by intervening and pervading the entire organisation, both the human resource department and marketing department should be concerned about it. As previously stated, the corporative brand represents corporative reputation (Holt, 2004). The brand mainly has 5 to 50% participation in the organisation's value on the market, and in some cases such as luxurious goods, the participation is over 50%. The brand's creation and preservation represents the huge challenge for the organisation's management department. British petrol management was thinking in which way to use the brand, and make more profit in each business segment. The management concluded they would succeed this only if the brand was managed form the top position. The business operations were confided to the managing director, the only person capable of both changing the organisational culture within the company and creating the company's image and reputation on the market. The corporative brands must connect internal and external environment, the employees and consumers, organisational culture and reputation, promises and reality. Today, organizations increasingly focus their attention on business processes. To have a business process that achieve results requires organizations rigorous approach, a sustained effort and commitment (Zakić, 2009). According Yohn (2009) the brand impacts the three primary processes of any business: product development, supply chain management, and customer relationship management, and the resources that drive each. The brands' creation and preservation do not rest upon the simple observation of the consumers, determination of their needs and demand for the employees to fulfil their needs. The brand must be real and relevant to every one connected with it (Hanić and Marić, 2006). Relevance is achieved through promises given by the company that are unique for each market segment, and accomplished through the consumers' experience in relation to the brand, what causes the brand and its promises to become a reality, (Knapp, 2000). The same thing is with the employees.

The organisation must give certain promises to them, which can be seen through the good conditions for career development, satisfaction in work, financial aspects. In this way, the possibility of passing the positive emotions

of the employees on both the organisation and consumers is higher (Holt, 2004). The question with clear answer is do the brands arise unprompted, uncontrolled and accidentally, or a studious strategy and hard work of the brand managers support them. It is certain that some brands have arisen and developed from the fortunate market conditions, but it is also certain that behind each of them stood a manager (Stamatović and Vukotić, 2009). Creation of a good brand and its management during its lifetime represents the process that is not happening over night, but it takes years, decades, and in some cases, centuries. The basic thing for creating and managing a brand successfully is clear vision of the brand manager regarding the position of his brand. Goals cannot be determined without vision, there is no strategy or tactics without goals, and a brand would not exist without the above stated (Fisk, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

By using the conducted research, the important characteristics of a brand and suggestion for a new approach to the brand identity creation will be presented in this paper. No similar research has been found when browsing the printed literature and the one on the internet, so it is expected that many questions will be opened, which will be answered through some of the latter research in order to apply them more easily in the brand management practice. The research was focused on the consumers' perception of their favourite brands (when a consumer has its own favourite brand, loyalty to this brand occurs in most cases, and the goal of every brand manager is the consumers' loyalty to the brand), trying to determine what makes them favourite and which characteristics could be used for successful creation and management of new brands (Damjanović, 2009). By using the literature (Ries, 2001; Wheeler, 2006) and a series of minor research (Vaid 2003; Roberts and Lafley, 2005), 35 attributes which connect people with their favourite brands have been defined. The attributes represent the associations that the consumers have while shopping, using and sheer imagining of a brand. The Likert's ten point rating scale was used to examine in which quantity the consumers experience the offered brand's attributes. The questions in the questionnaire were formed for each attribute, and there was an additional explanation for the majority of the questions. Specificity of the research lies in the possibility of the examinees to choose their favourite brand by themselves and to analyse it in the questionnaire through the offered attributes. It was estimated that there was a significant emotional connection between the examinees and the brand, which gave more relevant results since their favourite brand is concerned. It was pointed out that the chosen brand must be the brand they used or still use in order to avoid the examinees to choose the brands they have no personal experience with. The survey was conducted over the internet. Regarding the prolixity, it was difficult to keep the examinees concentrated in the test versions of the questionnaire. In order to decrease the number of the examinees who abandon the filling in the questionnaire, the version that entirely occupied the examinees' attention and enabled the obtaining of the relevant information was created (Damjanović, 2009).

The preview of the offered brand's attributes and the formulated questions presented to the examinees follows:

Innovative

The question was: To what extent is you favourite brand inclined to improve, plan and introduce new products and services? (To which extent is it innovative).

Intelligent

The question was: If you favourite brand was actually a person, to which extent it would be able to easily solve problems? (How intelligent it would be).

Modern

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand modern? (It always follows trends in the comparison with the competition).

Dedicated

The question was: To what extent is your brand dedicated? (To which extent do you feel it tries to satisfy you and other consumers that use it).

Friendly

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand friendly? (To which extent could you hang out with it if it was a person, to which extent does it have the characteristics of a friend).

Charismatic

The question was: To what extent is your brand charismatic? (If it was a person, could your brand motivate and set in motion other people, would people carefully listen to it).

Sustainable

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand sustainable? (If it was a person, could your favourite brand sustain the punches or could it run a marathon).

Combative

The question was: To what extent is your brand combative? (If it was a person, would your favourite brand enter the fight without thinking in order to achieve something).

Different

The question was: To what extent is your brand different? (In comparison with the competition).

Aggressive

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand aggressive? (If it was a person, would your favourite brand be inclined to attack).

Attractive

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand attractive? (Whether in an aesthetic or any other way).

Fair

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand fair? (The brand would not hurt you or somebody else on purpose).

Stable

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand stable? (It is not easy to disturb it; it keeps the feet on the ground).

Brave

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand brave? (It is not afraid of the competition; it bravely strides towards the future).

Cool

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand cool? (In comparison with an actor or actress that are in your opinion the coolest).

Amusing

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand amusing? (Does it evoke positive emotions and do you want to spend as much time as possible with it).

Proud

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand proud? (If it was a person, would your favourite brand walk with his head high, would it act like a winner).

Flexible

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand flexible? (Is it capable to adjust the new situation quickly).

Optimistic

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand optimistic? (Do you think your favourite brand is expecting the bright future for every one and does it pass its optimism on you).

Reliable

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand reliable? (Can you rely on him entirely without any fear if it would fail you).

Responsible

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand responsible? (Your favourite brand would never leave you, it always keeps its promises).

Artistic

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand artistic? (If it was a person, would your favourite brand be talented for art and would the brand practice the art).

Unusual

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand unusual? (Unconventional and unexpected).

Wise

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand wise? (If it was a person, could it be a state president or ancient Greek philosopher).

Practical

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand practical? (When used).

Useful

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand useful? (For what is he intended for).

Global

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand global? (Equally experienced worldwide).

Exciting

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand exciting? (Does it excite you while buying and using it).

Informative

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand informative? (Does it offer you enough information about itself or its services/products).

Honest

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand honest? (Do you trust its recommendation and promises).

Active

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand active? (If it was a person, how active it would be in the living environment).

Urban

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand urban? (If it was a person, would it live and work in a big city).

Wealthy

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand wealthy?

Table 1. Review of the examinees specimen.

Examinees review	Number of the examinees	%
Female	704	59.7
Male	476	40.3
Serbia	534	45.3
Croatia	318	26.9
Bosnia i Herzegovina	209	17.7
Montenegro	72	6.1
Macedonia	47	4
Total	1180	100

Table 2. Ranking of the brand's attributes according to the examinees.

	All examinees	Female	Male
1	Useful	Urban	Useful
2	Urban	Useful	Urban
3	Practical	Practical	Global
4	Creative	Creative	Modern
5	Global	Attractive	Creative

(If it was a person, would it have a house and an expensive car).

Detailed

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand detailed? (Does it think of every detail).

Creative

The question was: To what extent is your favourite brand creative?

1180 examinees have filled in the questionnaire, 704 were female and 476 male. The examinees were from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia (Table 1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the questionnaire was processed and the attributes of the examinees' favourite brands were ranked, several dominating attributes among both women and men were distinguished. When women and their favourite brands are concerned, they perceive their favourite brands as urban, useful and practical. Men also love to perceive their favourite brands as useful and urban, but unlike women, men perceive their favourite brands as global. Attributes such as creative, modern, reliable, attractive, stable, active and optimistic were among the top attributes (Table 2). The five leading attributes will be

shown, since we have succeeded in ranking the brand's attributes according to the examinees' perception intensity, sex and age, brand's luxury and brand's associated industry.

The attribute useful

The attribute useful is ranked in the first place among 35 offered attributes of the favourite brand (Figure 2). Women perceive their favourite brands as useful to greater extent in comparison to men. The examinees perceive luxurious brands as more useful than those which are not luxurious. The examinees perceive the brands associated to the IT industry as the most useful, then follows the brands associated to the cosmetic industry, food and liquor industry, car industry, and as the least useful brands are perceived those associated to the shoe and clothing industry. No linear growth or fall was detected regarding the examinees age, starting from the youngest to the oldest. The attribute useful is greatly perceived by the examinees belonging to the elder group, then follows the group between the age of 26 and 30, and finally the group between the age of 21 and 25.

The attribute urban

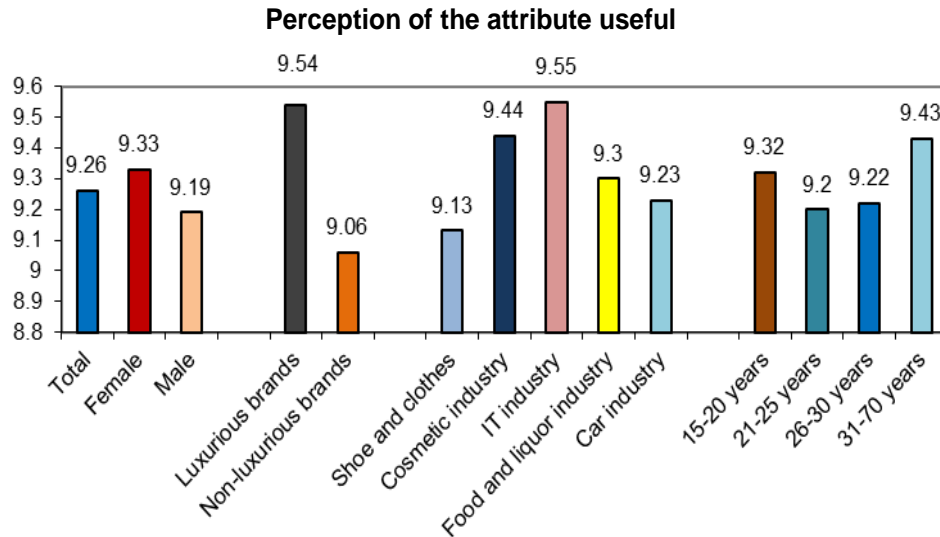The attribute urban is ranked in the second place among

Perception of the attribute useful

Figure 2. Perception review of the attribute useful.

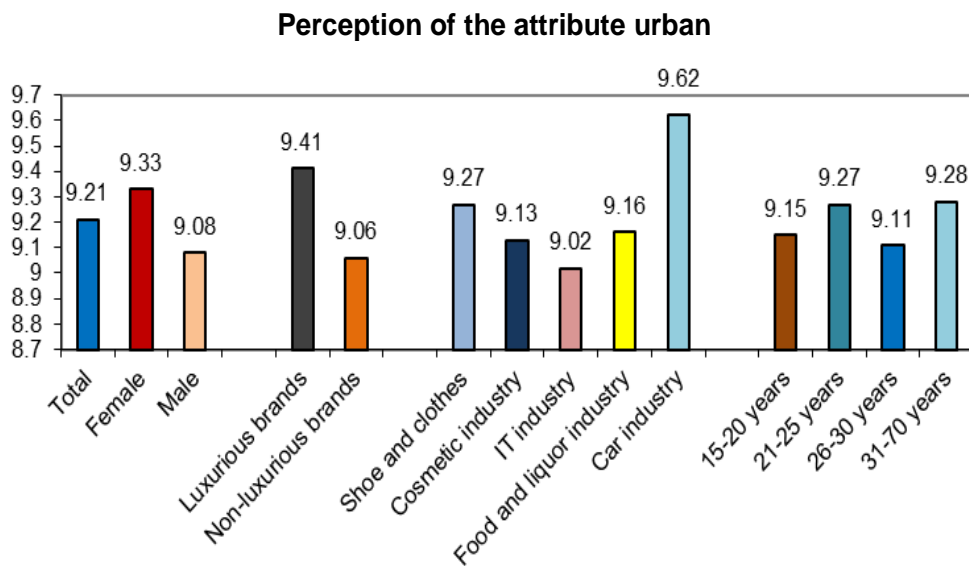## Perception of the attribute urban

Figure 3. Perception review of the attribute urban.

35 offered attributes of the favourite brand (Figure 3).

Women perceive their favourite brands as urban to greater extent in comparison to men. The examinees perceive luxurious brands as more urban than those that are not luxurious. The examinees perceive the brands associated with the car industry as the most urban, then follows the brands associated with the shoe and clothing industry, food and liquor industry, cosmetic industry and finally IT industry. No linear growth or fall was detected regarding the examinees age, starting from the youngest to the oldest. The attribute urban is greatly perceived by the eldest examinees, then follows group between the age of 21 and 25, then the youngest group and finally the

group between the age of 26 and 30.

The attribute practical

The attribute practical is ranked in the third place among 35 offered attributes of the favourite brand (Figure 4).

Women perceive their favourite brands as practical to greater extent in comparison to men. The examinees perceive luxurious brands as more practical than those which are not luxurious. The examinees perceive the brands associated with the food and liquor industry as the most practical, then follows the brands associated with
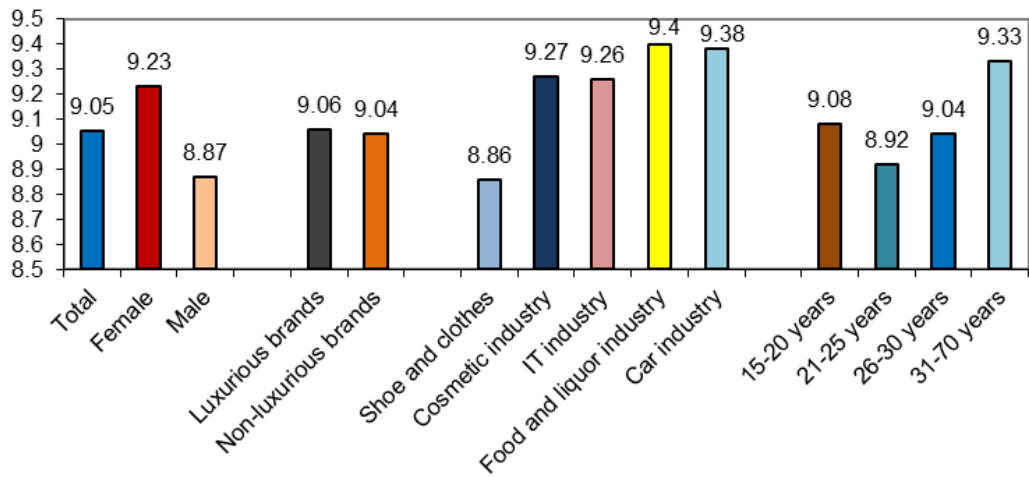
Perception of the attribute practical

Figure 4. Perception review of the attribute practical.

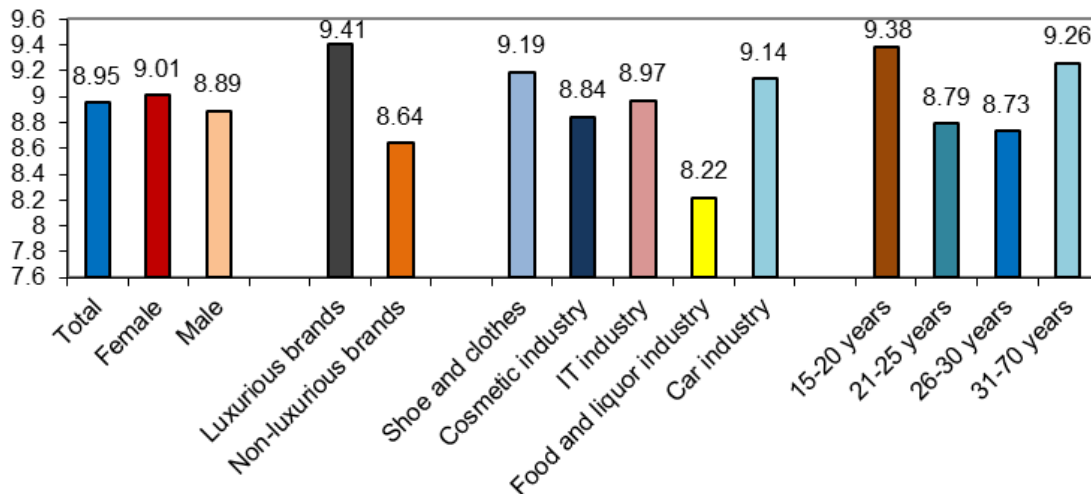## Perception of the attribute creative

Figure 5. Perception review of the attribute creative.

the car industry, cosmetic industry, IT industry, as the brands from the shoe and clothing industry are perceived as the most unpractical. No linear growth or fall was detected regarding the examinees age, starting from the youngest to the oldest. The attribute practical is greatly perceived by the eldest examinees, and then follows the youngest group, then the group between the age of 26 and 30 and finally the group between the age of 21 and 25.

The attribute creative

The attribute creative is ranked in the fourth place among

35 offered attributes of the favourite brand (Figure 5). Women perceive their favourite brands as creative to greater extent in comparison to men. The examinees perceive luxurious brands as more creative than those which are not luxurious. The examinees perceive the brands associated with the shoe and clothing industry as the most creative, then follows the brands associated with car industry, IT industry, cosmetic industry and finally food and liquor industry. The youngest examinees perceive their favourite brand as creative and the older the examinees the lower the perception. The final group (31 to 70 year olds) demonstrate deviation (this group is extremely large and there are certain differences within the group regarding the attribute perception of the
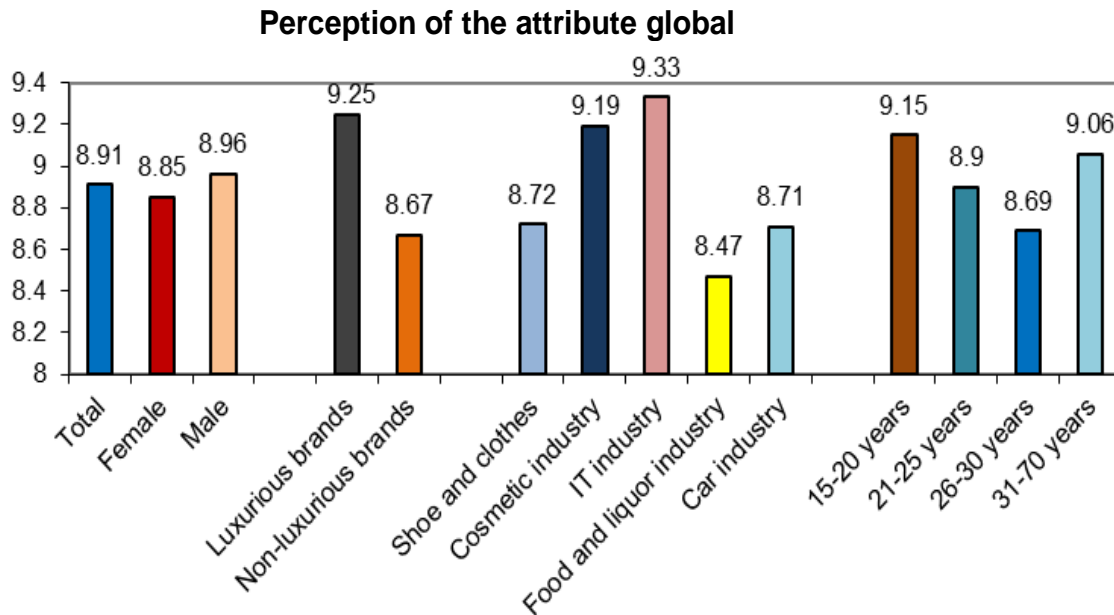
Perception of the attribute global

Figure 6. Perception review of the attribute global.

favourite brand. Still, owning to the small number of the examinees older than 40, it is presented in this way and it encompasses the examinees between the age of 31 and 70. The results could indicate that the dedication to a brand decreases before the 40's, and then it rises again. However, one cannot claim this with certainty and further research is needed).

The attribute global

The attribute global is ranked in the fifth place among 35 offered attributes of the favourite brand (Figure 6). Men perceive their favourite brands as global to greater extent in comparison to women. The examinees perceive luxurious brands as more global than those which are not luxurious. The examinees perceive the brands associated with the IT industry as the most global, then follows the brands associated with the cosmetic industry, shoe and clothing industry, car industry and finally food and liquor industry. The youngest examinees perceive their favourite brand as global, and the older the examinees the lower the perception. The final group of the examinees (31 to 70 year olds) demonstrate deviation (this group is extremely large and there are certain differences within the group regarding the attribute perception of the favourite brand. Still, owning to the small number of the examinees older than 40, it is presented in this way and it encompasses the examinees between the age of 31 and 70. The results could indicate that the dedication to a brand decreases before the 40's, and then it rises again. However, one cannot claim this with certainty and further research is needed).

CONCLUSION

The conducted research showed that certain attributes of the favourite brand perceived during the examinees contemplation or usage of a brand are largely perceived in comparison to the other attributes. This confirms the starting assumption that there are differences in the perception intensity of the offered attributes and that the differences occur during the result processing regarding the examinees sex, age, industry associated to their favourite brands and whether the brands are luxurious or not. Since we established which attributes were most intensively experienced with different brands which respondents find favourite, brand managers can easily decide which attribute they should incorporate in their brands, depending on the industry to which their brand belongs to, as well as demographic representation of their target group. Speaking of the first five attributes in the ranking and the industries to which the favourite brands belong to, we can conclude that it is recommendable to emphasize the attributes useful and global with brands in the IT industry. It would be advisable to use the attribute urban in the car industry, the attribute practical in food and beverages industry, and the attribute creative in the shoes and clothing industry. The following step that would help and alleviate the branding process refers to the means the suggested brand's attributes can be implemented into the brand itself. It would be necessary to examine each suggested brand attribute and, according to the research, nominate the best way for implementing the attributes into a brand or point them out additionally.

The attributes, attention is mostly paid to during the

branding process belong to the so-called functional component of a brand. These attributes are useful, practical, informative, reliable, sustainable, different and unusual. Clearly, it is easier to manipulate with these attributes because they are explicit and represent something tangible. However, the top attributes perceived the most intensively are the attributes such as urban, creative, modern, attractive, stable, brave, active and optimistic. These attributes are not tangible and they represent the comparative and emotional brand components, which are difficult to manage. However, having in mind that most people can assess whether something is urban or creative or not, it is the fact a brand manager can direct the brand towards the desired attributes during the brand creation and management. The example of the attribute incorporation such as urban is the following. First, it is necessary to determine what the examinees indisputably perceive as urban. The most probable answer would be that street, glass, neon light, traffic, specific clothes, fuss, traffic noise represent something urban. The brand manager could use these things in the entire branding process in order to emphasise urban. It could be seen from the business interior decoration, product or service creation and PR actions until the organisational culture in the company. The same stands for the rest of the attributes. Some of them are not clear and specific at first sight, but we always nourish feelings for them and we can always recognise them. In order to create a brand, the effort of the marketing department is not enough any more.

Synergy of every employee is necessary for the successful construction, but those at the top positions within a company are the most responsible. Changes and directions must always come from the sheer top, so it is crucial that people who understand the brand in every way and have strong leadership features lead the company. The brand strength directly depends upon the consumers' perception. The only way to make the perception tangible is to use the attributes associated to the brands. If we know which attributes we want our consumers to see in the brand, than there is no reason to for hiding the attributes.

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